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ABSTRACT

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PERSONALISM AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION

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Abstract

Attribution theory predicts that actions seen as specifically directed toward a person have greater impact than those not so directed. It was hypothesized that agreement between self-evaluation and another's evaluation increases personalism of received evaluations, increasing both impact and tendency to reciprocate liking or disliking. In a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design, 66 subjects received a high or low score on two tests of social insight. Each subject then received evaluations, supposedly from another subject, indicating (1) the partner estimated the subject's social insight as well above or below average, and (2) the partner liked the subject very much or disliked him moderately. Liking for the partner was the dependent variable. Results supported the experimental hypothesis; a significant ($p < .001$) three-way interaction effect was observed.

PERSONALISM AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION[1]

David A. Potter[2]

Educational Testing Service

Feelings toward others significantly depend on our perception of others' response to us. Generally, we like those who like us and dislike those who dislike us. So pervasive is this tendency that Jones and Gerard (1967) consider others' feelings toward us to be "a major determinant of attraction to particular other persons [p. 283]"; exchange theorists like Blau (1964) and Homans (1961) also emphasize social approval in explaining interpersonal attraction.

But this tendency toward liking reciprocity is not universal. The effects of received liking or disliking have been shown to be attenuated by such variables as inconsistency (Deutsch & Solomon, 1959); the attribution of an ulterior motive to the other person (Dickoff, 1961); and comparison to previous levels of received liking (Aronson & Linder, 1965).

One factor mediating reactions to received affect may be the perceived locus of causality of that affect. Heider's (1958) seminal work in attribution theory, and its extension by Jones and Davis (1965), suggest that reactions to liking or disliking may be mediated by the perception of that affect as being caused by the self ("he likes me for what I am") or by the other ("he dislikes me because he is a misogynist"). This idea, most clearly expressed in Jones and Davis' (1965) concept of personalism, is that the impact of one person's (O's) actions upon another (P) is greatest when that action is seen by P as contingent upon his own characteristics. The tendency toward liking reciprocity, then, would be strongest when the liking or disliking received is personalistic (attributed by P to his own characteristics)

than when it is not (e.g., when it is attributed by P either to O's characteristics or to situational variables).

An important variable affecting the attribution of personalism to an action may be the similarity between an individual's self-evaluation and another's evaluation of him. If O perceives P as P perceives himself, O's liking or disliking for P may be considered personalistic. If, on the other hand, O's evaluation of P is not consistent with P's self-evaluation, his affect for P cannot be personalistic. O's actions can only be regarded as contingent upon P's characteristics when O is aware of those characteristics. Liking reciprocity should therefore be greatest when O's evaluation of P agrees with P's evaluation of himself.

A study reported by Jones, Knurek, and Regan (in press) provides partial support for the hypothesized relationship between personalism and liking reciprocity. Having assumed that subjects would have generally favorable self-evaluations (an assumption supported by self-report data), they provided subjects with ratings, supposedly from their partners, that were either positive (and consistent) or negative (and therefore inconsistent). The partner's liking for the subject was then varied; measures of the subject's liking for the partner showed a significant interaction between self-consistency and liking. This interaction, however, resulted from the high scores obtained when subjects were both liked and positively evaluated by their partners. Other data obtained in the study tend to support the personalism hypothesis; however, a more direct test requires that personalism be manipulated directly. This study was designed to provide such a direct, experimental test.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 66 paid volunteers recruited from the men's dormitories at Cornell University. Only subjects who stated they had never taken a psychology course were selected. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions.

Procedure

Subjects were taken to small, individual rooms and asked to read a letter presenting the experiment as "a study of impression formation--the process by which we get to know other people . . . . In order to study this process, we are bringing two strangers (you and another subject, who will be your partner throughout the entire study) together, and giving them a chance to get to know each other. We then allow them to exchange certain limited, specific information about how they feel and what they believe about each other." The letter went on to discuss individual differences in social sensitivity or insightfulness, the importance of this ability in the acquaintance process, and thus the necessity "for us to know exactly how insightful each of our subjects is." The Chapin Social Insight Test (Chapin, 1968) was then presented as "an accurate, well-substantiated measure of . . . social sensitivity . . . ." The experimenter next administered the Chapin Test, the Feldman-Collier Personality Inference Test (actually a fictitious test; Jones & Ratner, 1967) and the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Any questions that subjects had were answered by the experimenter, who then left subjects alone to take the three tests.

When subjects had finished, the tests were collected by the experimenter to be scored. Subjects were then taken to the laboratory lounge, where they were told to introduce themselves to each other. Subjects were then left together for about two to three minutes.

The experimenter returned and briefly reviewed the purposes and procedures of the study, which he said would involve the subjects in a series of experimental sessions with the same partner. He then conducted a relatively informal interview in which each subject was asked several questions about his interpersonal relations; this was done to give each subject the feeling that he had revealed something of himself to his partner, thereby rendering credible the evaluations he would later receive.

Manipulation of Self-Evaluation

Following this 15-20 minute interview, subjects were taken back to the individual testing rooms and given randomly assigned scoring summary sheets on the Chapin and Feldman-Collier tests; subjects were given scores which indicated that, "relative to other Cornell students who had taken the test," their scores fell either at the 93rd percentile on the Chapin Social Insight Test and at the 89th percentile on the Feldman-Collier Personality Inference Test (high self-evaluation condition), or at the 31st percentile on the Chapin Test and at the 34th percentile on the Feldman-Collier Test (low self-evaluation condition). These scores were discussed with subjects to make sure that they understood the test results.

Subjects were then given a blank form on which they were asked to rate their partner "on as many . . . scales as you feel you can; on the other hand, if you just don't know him well enough yet to be able to say anything about how he stands on a given trait, don't fill that one out. Fill out

only those scales where you feel you know enough about him to rate him." The form contained six rating scales, including ratings of the partner's political attitudes, moral values, and psychological adjustment, in addition to the two crucial items: "How insightful is your partner?" and "How much do you like him?"[3] It was explained to subjects that this form was not confidential, but would be exchanged between partners.

Manipulation of Other's Evaluation and Other's Liking

After these forms had been filled out and collected, each subject was given a form which he was told was "the one your partner filled out on you." This form contained a randomly assigned rating of subject's social insight ability and a rating of how much his partner liked him; the other four scales were left blank.

From this form, subjects learned that their partner considered their social insight ability to be either quite a bit below average (low other condition) or quite a bit above average (high other condition), relative to other Cornell students.

The liking manipulation cut across the manipulation of the partner's evaluation. Fifty percent of the subjects saw, from the form, that their partner liked them very much (liked condition), while the other 50% saw that they were disliked moderately by their partner (disliked condition).

The full research design was thus a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial (self-evaluation X other's evaluation X other's liking). The agreement (or lack thereof) between subject's test scores and the partner's evaluation of his social sensitivity constituted the manipulation of personalism.

Dependent Variables

The major dependent variable was subjects' feelings toward their partners; secondary dependent variables measured subjects' beliefs about their partners. Subjects were told, through both oral and written instructions, that their responses should be guided by their "gut reaction" to their partner--"how do you really feel about him?"

After subjects had completed the measure of the affective dependent variable, they were given Questionnaire II, which required them to rate their partner on discernment and likability and to predict how the partner's liking for the subject would be likely to change over the course of future sessions. Subjects were asked to "concentrate on making an objective, cool, rational evaluation of [their] partner. What kind of person is he, regardless of whether you like or dislike him?"

Finally, a postexperimental questionnaire was administered, containing manipulation checks and other questions aimed at clarifying the results. Subjects were then extensively debriefed, implored not to discuss the experiment, paid for their participation, and dismissed.

Control of Experimenter Bias

Two different persons, the author and an undergraduate research assistant, served as experimenters in this research. Comparison of the data obtained from these two experimenters revealed no differences.

The experimenters were unaware of the experimental condition to which each subject was assigned until the point at which subjects' scores on social sensitivity were discussed with them. These scores, however, were only half of the personalism manipulation. The partner's rating of the subject's

social sensitivity constituted the other half; and since both this rating and the partner's rated liking for the subject required no explanation, the experimenter simply handed this form to the subject without looking at it himself. The experimenter was therefore effectively blind on both the personalism and the liking manipulations.

Results[4]

Subjects' responses to questions designed to assess the effectiveness of the manipulations showed clearly that all manipulations produced the intended effects. Subjects in the Like condition rated their partners' liking for them higher than subjects in the Dislike condition (means = 2.03 and 5.27; $\underline{F} = 261.65$; $\underline{p} < .001$); there were no other significant effects on this measure. The manipulation of personalism (agreement between other's evaluation and self-evaluation) was also successful; subjects in the personalism condition (High self - High other and Low self - Low other) saw their partner's perception of them as more accurate than subjects did in the nonpersonalistic (High self - Low other and Low self - High other) conditions (means = 3.52 and 4.85; $\underline{F} = 12.54$; $\underline{p} < .001$). There was also a significant main effect of the liking variable; subjects tended to rate partners who liked them as more accurate than partners who disliked them (means = 3.81 and 4.67; $\underline{F} = 4.79$; $\underline{p} < .033$).

Also supporting the success of the personalism manipulation were subjects' responses to the question, "How do you imagine your partner generally responds to the people he meets?". Personalistic actions should be attributed by the subject to himself rather than to the other person; subjects in the nonpersonalistic conditions should believe that the partner's

response to them was typical of his response to people in general and should therefore expect him to respond to others as he responded to them. Subjects in the personalistic condition having no data beyond their partner's response to them, upon which to base a decision, should also predict that the partner's response to others would be in the same direction as his response to them but they should tend to make less extreme predictions. Relevant data are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The observed results strongly

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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support this notion. Subjects in all conditions predicted that their partner would tend to respond to others as he had responded to them. The extremity of these ratings, however, was governed by the accuracy with which subjects had been evaluated by their partner. This interaction (self-evaluation X other's evaluation X liking) was significant ($F = 5.34$; $p < .025$) as was the main effect of the liking manipulation ($F = 38.50$; $p < .001$).

The major hypothesis of this study was that the more personalistic one person's liking for another, the stronger the tendency for that liking to be reciprocated. All subjects were expected to like partners who liked them and to dislike partners who disliked them; but these reactions to the partner were expected to be more extreme in conditions in which the partner's evaluation of the subject agreed with the subject's self-evaluation. The dependent variable measure was a seven-point scale on which subjects were asked to ". . . indicate your present liking for your partner . . . what do you really feel about him?" The scale ranged from "I dislike him extremely" to "I like him extremely much." Data from this measure are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here

The pattern of results depicted in Table 3 is what was predicted. The direction of a subject's response to his partner was determined by the liking manipulation, whereas the extremity of the reaction (that is, the degree to which liking was reciprocated) was determined by agreement or disagreement between the subject's self-evaluation and his partner's evaluation of him. The main effect of the liking manipulation was highly significant ($F = 24.39$; $p < .001$), as was the three-way interaction effect among self-evaluation, partner's evaluation, and partner's liking ($F = 13.79$; $p < .001$); no other significant effects were observed (see Table 4).

The importance of personalism in determining subjects' reactions to their partners is highlighted by pairwise comparison (Scheffé, 1959) of the cell means in Table 3. In the personalistic conditions (High self, High other, and Low self, Low other), the differences between means in the Like and Dislike conditions are large (2.00 and 2.61) and significant ($p < .01$). In the non-personalistic conditions (High self, Low other, and Low self, High other), these differences (.25 and .50) are not significant. Although in all conditions there was a tendency for subjects to reciprocate received liking, reciprocity was far from uniform; the main effect of the liking manipulation resulted from the extremity of subjects' ratings of liking for their partner in the personalistic conditions.

Strongest support for the hypothesized relationship between personalism and liking reciprocity is found in a comparison of the data presented in Tables 1 and 3. Personalistic esteem is by definition conditioned by the recipient's (P's) unique characteristics; causality is attributed by P to

himself rather than to O's characteristics or to situational variables. Jones and Davis (1965) suggest that special impact of such personalistic actions "may lie in the fact that it satisfies the receiver's needs for information about his worthiness, as well as other needs for security, power over others, and so on." Personalistic liking, as compared with nonpersonalistic esteem, would be particularly satisfying to the receiver's needs, while personalistic disliking would be particularly frustrating; P would therefore tend more strongly to respond in kind to O when O's liking is seen as personalistic. Table 3, depicting the subject's response to his partner, shows just such a pattern of results.

Table 1, on the other hand, shows how the subjects predicted their partners would generally respond to other people. Personalistic liking is by definition uniquely conditioned by P's own characteristics, while nonpersonalistic liking is attributed by P to O's dispositional characteristics. As compared with subjects in the personalistic condition, subjects in the nonpersonalistic condition should feel more strongly that they know how their partner would respond to people in general, and would therefore be more extreme in their prediction of how he would respond to others. In general, personalistic approval carries information about oneself ("I am a good, worthy, person."); nonpersonalistic approval or disapproval is more informative about the other person ("He is gregarious; he is a misanthrope."). The data presented in Table 1 reflect this; subjects in the nonpersonalistic conditions did indeed make more extreme predictions than subjects in the personalistic condition.

The different patterns of responses depicted in Tables 1 and 3 thus provide strong support for the hypothesized relationships between personalism and liking reciprocity. It is pleasant to be liked, and painful to be disliked;

but when this liking or disliking is seen as being based on an inaccurate appraisal of our own characteristics, it at once moves us less and tells us more about the other person than when someone likes or dislikes us because of what we really are.

Discussion

Although the concept of personalism as discussed above provides a satisfactory explanation for the observed relationships among self-evaluation, other's evaluation, and liking, and although this explanation is supported by the data, there are other plausible explanations. Data from the post-experimental questionnaire are valuable aids in choosing among such alternatives.

To begin with, a person who is accurate in his beliefs about us may be seen by us as an especially discriminating person, thereby causing his approval or disapproval to have greater impact on our self-esteem than evaluations received from a less accurate, less discriminating, person. A discriminating person is by definition a "good judge of character"; his esteem therefore affects us more profoundly than does esteem (or a lack thereof) from someone less discriminating, whose evaluations can easily be discounted since "he really doesn't know what he's talking about."

This explanation, however, received no support from the data. Subjects' ratings of the partner's discernment were not significantly affected by the personalism manipulation; in fact, the only significant effect was produced by the liking manipulation. Subjects in the Like condition rated their partners as significantly more perceptive than did subjects in the Dislike condition ($\underline{F} = 14.761$; $\underline{p} < .001$). Since the partner was not regarded as

more discriminating in the personalistic than in the nonpersonalistic condition, differences in perceived discrimination do not explain the observed interaction.

A second possible alternative explanation for the observed relationship between personalism and liking reciprocity is that liking perceived as based on an accurate perception might be regarded as potentially more stable than liking resting on inaccurate beliefs. A person who sees us as we see ourselves should not be expected to change his opinion in future interactions; on the contrary, the information he gains in the future should only confirm his impression, thereby reinforcing his initial reaction. If, however, another person likes or dislikes us because of an inaccurate perception of our characteristics, we might expect future interaction to correct his view, with a consequent change in his liking.

The data, however, do not support such an explanation. Two separate items require subjects to predict how their partners might react to them in the future; the only significant effect was again associated with the liking manipulation. Subjects predicted that partners liking them now would like them more in the future than they would if they disliked them now ($F = 20.059$; $p < .001$).

Conclusions

The results of this research strongly indicate that the effect of agreement between an individual's self-evaluation and the evaluation he receives from others on liking reciprocity may best be accounted for in terms of the personalism of received liking. When another agrees with our self-evaluation, we see his approval or disapproval as uniquely focused on us; and such focused evaluative information has a much stronger impact on self-esteem than does less

personalistic approval. We therefore tend to more strongly reciprocate personalistic than nonpersonalistic liking.

This finding also has implications for the conflict between approval theory and consistency theory in interpersonal attraction (Jones & Pines, 1968). Consistency theory maintains that we are attracted to those who agree with our self-evaluation; approval theory holds that we like those who like us and dislike those who dislike us. The two theories agree completely in their predictions with regard to a person whose self-evaluation is uniformly positive. They come into conflict, however, when attention is focused on a person who negatively evaluates either himself or one of his attributes. If I am a bad dancer, and you like me because you think I'm a good dancer, do I like you for your favorable opinion (approval theory)? Or do I respond less favorably because you disagree with my self-evaluation (consistency theory)? Jones and Pines (1968) suggest that "people are motivated to be self-consistent and accurate about their self-evaluations when inconsistency or inaccuracy can lead to negatively reinforcing outcomes." In short, it is suggested that there is nothing particularly desirable about self-consistency per se; consistency in interpersonal relations will be sought only when it serves to help the person reach his own goals. Consistency would thus interact with other aspects of the situation to jointly determine one person's response to another.

The results of the study discussed above are consistent with such an interpretation. Both consistency theory and approval theory could adequately explain the pattern of results observed in the Like condition; consistency theory, however, encounters difficulty when confronted with the results from the Dislike condition, where the most consistent cell (low self-evaluation, low other's evaluation, dislike) is also the cell in which the partner was

most disliked. Consistency in this case does not by itself lead to attraction; rather, the value attached to consistency depends on whether it is linked to approval or disapproval. Consistency reinforces the impact on self-esteem of approval or disapproval. Contrary to the prediction of consistency theory, an inconsistent, disapproving individual was preferred to a consistent, disapproving person; on the other hand, a consistent, approving evaluator was preferred to an inconsistent, approving one.

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Footnotes

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[2]Requests for reprints should be sent to David A. Potter, Teacher Behavior Research Group, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

[3]Analysis of the data obtained from these initial ratings of liking for the partner revealed no significant differences among conditions.

[4]Four of the 66 subjects were eliminated from the analyses because of their extreme suspiciousness--i.e., they spontaneously expressed complete disbelief of one or more of the experimental manipulations. However, when the results obtained from the four were included in the analyses, all of the effects discussed below remained significant.

Table 1

Mean Responses, Personalism Measure: "How Do You Imagine Your Partner Generally Responds to the People He Meets?"

(Lower Number Indicates Greater Liking)

Partner's Evaluation	Like		Dislike	
	High Other	Low Other	High Other	Low Other
Self-Evaluation				
High S-E	2.86	2.88	4.14	4.63
Low S-E	1.89	3.38	4.75	4.14

Table 2

Analysis of Variance, Personalism Measure

Source	df	MS	F
Self-evaluation (S)	1	.42	.36
Other's evaluation (O)	1	2.21	1.87
Liking (L)	1	45.33	38.50**
S x O	1	.25	.21
S x L	1	.47	.40
O x L	1	2.81	2.38
S x O x L	1	6.29	5.34*
Error	54	1.18	

*$p < .05$

**$p < .001$

Table 3

Mean Responses, Liking Measure: "Please Indicate Your Present Liking for Your Partner . . ."

(Lower Number Indicates Greater Liking)

Partner's Evaluation	Like		Dislike	
	High Other	Low Other	High Other	Low Other
Self-Evaluation				
High S-E	2.43	3.13	4.43	3.63
Low S-E	3.00	2.25	3.25	4.86

*For significance ($p < .05$) of pair-wise comparisons, the absolute difference between the means must exceed 1.04 (Scheffé, 1959).

Table 4

Analysis of Variance, Liking Measure

Source	df	MS	F
Self-evaluation (S)	1	.22	.21
Other's evaluation (O)	1	.37	.35
Liking (L)	1	25.31	24.39*
S x O	1	.64	.62
S x L	1	.09	.09
O x L	1	.92	.88
S x O x L	1	14.31	13.79*
Error	54	1.04	

*$p < .001$